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ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
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FM AMEMBASSY KAMPALA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8584  
INFO RUEHKG/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM 0569  
RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE  
RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE  
RUEHTO/AMEMBASSY MAPUTO 0396  
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 3219

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KAMPALA 000630

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [UG](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: NORTHERN UGANDA: LRA TALKS TO RESUME APRIL 23

REF: KAMPALA 448

11. (U) This is an action request. See paragraph 10 for proposed press guidance.

12. (SBU) Summary: Negotiations between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) are set to resume in Juba, Southern Sudan on April 26. The two parties agreed to extend the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement to June 30 and that LRA remaining in southern Sudan and northern Uganda could assemble at Rikwangba. The resumption of the talks is a positive development, for which U.N. Special Envoy Chissano has requested support from the international community. End Summary.

13. (SBU) On April 15, U.N. Special Envoy for LRA-Affected Areas Joaquim Chissano briefed the diplomatic corps on the progress made in his meetings with the LRA. During the April 13 and 14 meetings, Chissano described a perceptible change in the demeanor of the LRA leadership from his previous encounters with Joseph Kony and Vincent Otti in March. In the past, the LRA leaders and fighters were all dressed in combat fatigues. However, during these meetings the two leaders were dressed in matching suits and ties and other LRA members wore safari suits. The LRA accepted the food Chissano brought along in sharp contrast with past encounters in which the LRA refused the offering for fear it was poisoned.

14. (SBU) Kony opened the April 13 meeting with an outline of the reasons the LRA walked out of the talks. Kony requested that the Ugandan military stop attacking the LRA and that the United Nations supervise the peace process. He asked to be left alone with the Government of Uganda team to discuss the status of the International Criminal Court (ICC) indictments, renewal of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, and the way forward at the negotiations. The GOU's lead negotiator Ruhakana Rugunda reiterated the Government's desire for peace and offered to facilitate the movement of the LRA to the assembly areas.

15. (SBU) Chissano orchestrated a photograph of Kony and Rugunda shaking hands over their agreement that they wanted peace. For Chissano, the symbolism of replicating his own handshake with RENAMO leaders in Rome years ago was important. Chissano told the diplomatic corps that once such a commitment for peace was made, "all the rest is details." Chissano and mediator Riek Machar also were able to hammer out agreement on festering issues such as food supply for the fighters as they assemble, allowances, and the number of delegates allowed at the negotiations. It was agreed that the LRA delegates would receive 70 USD in per diem and 50 USD worth of satellite telephone airtime per day. Initially it was agreed that each side would send 15 delegates to Juba, but Chissano later argued to increase the number of LRA allowed to 17 so that fighters could be included at the table. Machar promised to assign better security to the LRA team in Juba to alleviate their complaints about alleged unfair treatment and abuse at the hands of the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army soldiers.

¶16. (SBU) The GOU and LRA agreed to extend the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement to June 30. LRA members in southern Sudan and northern Uganda would be allowed to cross the Nile River to assemble at Rikwangba. The GOU had offered to transport the LRA to the assembly area, but the LRA refused, preferring that its members travel on foot. Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, and South Africa would each provide two observers for the negotiations. The Democratic Republic of Congo did not send a representative with the team on this visit because the previous individual had been replaced. Liaison officers would be posted to a town close to the assembly area to facilitate the movement of LRA fighters and subsequent communication between Rikwangba and Juba.

¶17. (SBU) Chissano stated that he believed that the LRA was much more serious than during his previous meetings. Members of the GOU negotiating team also were pleased with the outcome of the meetings. Felix Kulayigye, the Ugandan Peoples' Defense Forces' member of the negotiating team, told emboffs that Kony and Otti had become confused over whether or not the indictments could be lifted. In meetings and telephone calls from the LRA delegation, Kony and Otti may have been told that the ICC indictments could be dropped. Owiny Dollo, the GOU's lawyer, explained to them the GOU's constraints and options regarding the ICC. Kulayigye said that Dollo appeared to have convinced Kony and Otti that a peace deal maximized the options of all parties. Chissano emphasized to the indicted LRA leadership that the best way forward on the indictments was for a peace deal to be concluded that would bring lasting peace to northern Uganda. The international community would then have to weigh the benefits of peace relative to international forms of justice. Chissano also told the LRA that solutions to the political problems raised during the negotiations must be dealt with in Uganda by Ugandans, not at Juba.

¶18. (SBU) In addition to the Cessation of Hostilities agreement, a  
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communique was signed. A draft of the communique released as was an April 11 press statement by Pax Christi, a Netherlands-based non-governmental organization. The press statement touted "significant agreements" reached between the LRA's Juba delegates and President Museveni's brother, Salim Saleh, in Mombasa. According to GOU sources, however, Saleh went to Mobasa to listen to the LRA delegation but did not agree to anything. Kony and Otti also were surprised by the Pax Christi release, which they had not seen. Chissano was not pleased with Pax Christi's intervention. According to Kulayigye, nor Pax Christi and San Egidio would be welcome to Juba.

¶19. (SBU) Comment: The resumption of the peace talks is a welcome development and Special Envoy Chissano requested that the assembled members of the diplomatic corps show support for the Juba process. We are encouraged by this development and the apparent seriousness on the part of the LRA, but remain cautious that the devil may be in the details as the parties thrash out the next agenda item on accountability mechanisms. A final agreement must also contain an acceptable solution to ensure the security of Kony, Otti, the other indictees, and the fighters. End comment.

¶110. (SBU) Proposed press release: To respond to Chissano's request for support and to support the GOU's efforts, post recommends the Department release a press statement. "The United States Government welcomes the agreement between the Government of Uganda and Lord's Resistance Army to resume peace talks on April 26 in Juba, Southern Sudan to extend the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. We appreciate the efforts of the U.N. Special Envoy and the mediator to resolve outstanding issues that had been obstacles to the process. A durable peace agreement that puts an end to the 21-year old conflict and the suffering of hundreds of thousands of displaced northern Ugandans is vital to the region and the future of Uganda."

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